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24 - 56 - 58

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THE SENECA  
TRAIL

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The Great North  
Road

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BY ANDREW PRICE

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24 plus 56 plus 58  
equals ?

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## The Seneca Trail

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A painter came one day and picked out a fine, large electric light pole at my front gate and painted a broad band of white around it. Then he made a red border around the top of it and around the bottom of it another red border and it looked very tasty. Then on the south side he put the figures "24" and on the north side the same so large that even he who runs a motor car can read it as he goes skyhooting down the road.

It seems now that 24 means that Marlinton is on the great north and south highway projected in the State's scheme of good roads. A late map shows that 24 begins at Princeton on our southern border thence in a northerly direction by Glenlyn where it crosses New River, by Peterstown, Lindside, Union, Pickaway, Ronceverte, Lewisburg, Renick, Hillsboro, Marlinton, Edray, Linwood, Mingo, to Huttonsville, where it connects with 56 and with it to Elkins, and thence with 58 by Parsons, to Brookside in Preston county, on the Maryland line, and thence by way of Oakland to points farther north.

Anyway that is the way that rumor has it and a glance at a recent road map would indicate that this is the long continuous north and south road through West Virginia. Roosevelt called attention to the long trough like valleys of the Alleghenies and the road as outlined above takes full advantage of this trough like formation.

It is in the country of the forest reserve, the new State parks, and the proposed national park. By the way, the commissioners appointed to look over the various park sites have decided that in their opinion that our mountains will not do for such a park because there are too many improvements. This should not mean an abandonment of the enterprise for Congress has not acted on the proposition, and it may well be the mature judgment of the governing body that the settled communities within

these rich mountains will afford the tourists an opportunity for a lodging for the night and also supply them with sustenance for their camps. If it is to be the playground of the nation, why should not the towns and the well kept farms add to the attraction? Tourists want to rough it but do not want it too rough. And the fine roads ought to have great weight with Congress as sparing the expense of new roads that otherwise would have to be built at national expense. It is Congressman Taylor's chance to get busy on a matter that most nearly affects his district. Let the tourists come and they can live off of the country for a consideration.

The great north and south road will be the great scenic route of the nation.

The road as outlined above touches the waters of the Cheat Tygart's Valley, Greenbrier, New, and Blue-stone. There is a peculiar formation just east of the height of land that marks the eastern boundary of the State of West Virginia. The Greenbrier River for something like a hundred and seventy miles washes the foot of the main Allegheny and its continuations and from the mouth of the river the Blue Stone River continues the formation south into the State of Virginia.

The road will not be far at any point from the old War Road of the Five Nations. Of late years this has been generally referred to as the Seneca Trail, though one may look in the old histories in vain for that term. It is the outgrowth of the accounts that such a trail was garrisoned and policed by the Seneca Indians in the days when the Iroquois held possession of the country.

Mr. Hu Maxwell, an eminent West Virginian historian, is of the opinion that the trail crossed over the main Allegheny into Pendleton county and then turned south, but in this he is mistaken.

It is as certain as such things can be that this War Road could not at any place have crossed over and continued at any point on the east side of the mountains. For a period of time almost equalling the existence of the United States the main Allegheny was the barrier that interposed and marked the division between the



lands controled by the whites and the Indians, and for a great period of that time it was defined by written treaties between the Five Nations and the English people, especially of Virginia.

In 1768, by the treaty of Fort Stanwix, (Rome N. Y.,) the British were given the rights to the lands now comprising the Western Waters of West Virginia, but it could not have affected the right to use this road for it belonged to all Indian tribes and the use of it was guaranteed by tribal agreements. And the treaty was with the Six Nations. Up to 1726, the Five Nations were the Mohawks, Onondagas, Cayugas, Oneidas, and the Senecas. That year Tuscaroras moved up from the Cherokee country and after that the Iroquois were known as the Six Nations.

In the war of Braddocks Defeat, 1755, the capture of Fort Duquesne, 1758, and the Battle of Point Pleasant 1774, the Iroquois and the Virginians were allies. But in 1776, on the breaking out of the Revolution, the Iroquois agreed to fight for the British, and there was a hair-buyer at Detroit, and the country west of the mountains was constantly harried by these northern Indians who had been their friends for many generations prior to that time.

In this immediate territory, referred to in those days as the the mountains of West Augusta, a military policy was adopted of organizing a department of scouts to anticipate the dreadful stealthy raids of these Indians. They were referred to as Indian spies. That was the name for the service and it was considered to be of the greatest importance and the most skillful woodsmen were employed upon it, and they took a special oath of office, one clause being that he would never under any circumstances light a fire while upon his duties. These men were gone for months at a time and it can be imagined the discomforts that they must have suffered by not being able to have a fire. In the eighteenth-thirties they became entitled to pensions and a part of the requirements was that they record in their respective counties a circumstantial account of their services.

These form valuable historical



data, and in this county it can be seen that their main duty was to watch the Seneca Trail and give notice of approaching bands of Indians. John Bradshaw was one of these. His home was at Huntersville. He watched the trail in Monroe county. Jacob Kinnison was another. He watched the trail from the Levels to Clover Lick.

The reason of the fort at Marlinton, then called Greenbrier, was this trail. The fort was maintained just a mile east of the trail.

Thomas King, Iroquois chief, October 18, 1758, at Easton, Pennsylvania, entered a complaint that in 1755 a party of Iroquois were taken prisoners at Greenbrier by one hundred and fifty white soldiers. That was the year General Lewis was here with a company. The chief's main ground of complaint was that the Indians were on the Warrior's Road, where all had a right to pass unmolested. See Hazard's Pennsylvania Register, V p. 373: and Penn. Records, VII, pp. 197 8

Bridgers Gap five miles south of Marlinton was on this trail. Withers Border Warfare p. 292.

In the march to Point Pleasant, the Holstein companies joined Gen. Lewis at Lewisburg, indicating that they had come north on the War Road Withers p. 165.

War path passed near Files's cabin at Beverly. Withers p. 75

In 1779, the last raid on the Marlinton settlements, the 13 persons killed all lived close by the War Road as now located.

In the seventeen-fifties when eighteen people were killed at Greenbrier, now Marlinton, all were near this trail, and probably this caused the place to be garrisoned in 1755 by General Lewis

Tradition establishes this trail and it is well marked yet in many places. One place in particular high up on the Swago mountain in the woods where there never was sled or a wagon the trail looks like an old abandoned county road. Innumerable camping places where water was convenient mark the course of the trail. No doubt the trail was on Cheat east of Elkins but it came on up Shavers Fork of Cheat to the Greenbrier waters. It never could



have gone over the Allegheny Mountain on account of trespassing or the territory of the Virginian Indians.

See Winconsin Historical Society for original letter written by the famous Gen James Robertson to Col. Wm. Preston from Blue Stone River, June 23, 1774, when he was on a scout there looking forward to the Point Pleasant expedition which took place some months later in the same year. He reports that the proper place to watch was the War Road at a point some forty miles below where he was then stationed, for at that point the Indians have ever made a rendezvous to kill meat and to equip themselves.

It is extremely difficult to distinguish one Indian trail from another owing to the fact that the Indians had no written records and from the fact that the first settlers used the Indian trails for roads for many years, and you might say are still using them whenever convenient.

But I have been able to discover indisputable testimony that the Iroquois did not travel at any place in the Virginians east of the Allegheny, and that they entered into a treaty not to do so, and that the penalty for going east of the mountain to hunt or travel without a passport was punishable by death, or slavery in the West Indies.

From Virginia Laws, p. 109. In the year 1722, Virginia passed the following act:

After the ratification of the treaty intended with the Five Nations of Indians, at Albany, no Indian or Indians, tributary to this government shall cross Potowmack River or pass to the westward of the Great Ridge or Mountains, without a license first obtained from the governor or commander in chief of this Dominion, under the colony seal, containing the number of Indians so licensed, and the occasion of granting the same. And all and every such Indian offending herein, or going in greater numbers than mentioned in such license, on conviction shall suffer death, or be transported to the West Indies, there to be sold as slaves, as shall be awarded by the court hereby appointed for trial of said offenses. And if any tributary

Indian so offending, shall be killed, out of the limits aforesaid, by Foreign Indians, or by any of his Majesty's subjects inhabiting beyond the said limits, or shall be taken up, transported or sold by either of them, no satisfaction shall be demanded by this government, for such killing or transportation.

None of the Indians of the said Five Nations, shall, after the ratification aforesaid, hunt or travel in or through any part of this Dominion lying on the south side of the Potowmack, or on the east side of the said Great Ridge of Mountains, without license from the Governor, or Commander in Chief, of New York, under the like penalties hereinbefore inflicted on the tributary Indians

The date of the volume from which I quote is missing but it must have been published not earlier than 1736, for it contains laws of that date. But it belongs to colonial times.

The above act keeping the Iroquois well on the Western Waters bears the following notation at the foot of the page:

Note: A copy of this act was delivered to the Great Men of the Five Nations, under the seal of the colony, at the treaty at Albany, in September, 1722, and by them ratified

By the Great Ridge is meant what we call the Allegheny as distinguished from the Blue Ridge. At the time of this treaty Englishmen were already settling in the Valley of Virginia.

The Indians then residing in the Dominion were ruled with an iron but it is gratifying to see that my own tribe, the Paymunkey or Chickahominy Indians, were granted liberty to hunt and to range as heretofore

I have never had the opportunity to study the landmarks of the War Road in the northern part of the State, though I recorded the statement of the late Anthony Moore that he had followed the trail on the waters of Cheat in the Bowden vicinity. Mr. Maxwell, as well as his nephew Mr. Claude W. Maxwell, have located the trail as leaving the waters of Cheat and going over on the Tygarts Valley river and then back to Cheat River, and I have no doubt that they are right, for the tendency of the trail is to keep high



above the streams and it might easily dip over towards Tygarts River and come back. But they are wrong in crossing over the Allegheny Mountains. I think that they were determined to get by the Seneca Rocks, but it must be recalled that the Seneca Rocks were named by white men, and that the name Seneca Trail is also a name adopted by the whites and one that was never used by the Indians: With them it was The War Road, well defined, subject to any number of tribal agreements. The Senecas had that part of the Five Nations. It maintained the large number of Indian garrisons or villages along it, one of which was at Mingo.

Roosevelt in the Winning of the West, Vol. 1, page 122, speaking of the year 1769: The Western border of our country was then formed by the great barrier-chains of the Alleghenies, which ran north and south from Pennsylvania through Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, the trend of the valleys being parallel to the seacoast, and the mountains rising highest to the southward.

The Borden Lewis grants followed the 1722 treaty in a few years and were confined to the waters flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, until a sort of a fraud was practised on the council in London and a permit was gotten in the Greenbrier Valley under the which surveys were made. But before a single grant was issued the mistake or fraud was discovered and not a grant under English government. The Revolution had to be fought to confirm the title to the land on which Marlinton is built.

The treaty of Fort Stanwix, 1768, was no more than a quit claim by the Iroquois. The other Indians may have at all times claimed land and hunting rights in West Virginia, as well as the right to use the War Road. For while the settlers could come under color of title from the Iroquois after 1768, yet there was a continual warfare with the Shawnees and the Mingos, and probably the Cherokees, who had no part in the 1768 treaty. In fact the warfare was continuous from 1753 to 1779 over all of West Virginia, and even after that

date in the north-western part of the State.

It did not stop then with some of our old pioneers if some of our most cherished traditions are correct, for long after the last Indian shook the dust off his feet from the Western Virginian territory we are given to believe that the old Indian fighters continued their pursuit by mysterious hunting trips in the land of the setting sun. And their luck was a matter for whispered communications when they came back home for the winter

Mr. Claude W. Maxwell writes me that his uncle Mr. Hu Maxwell has found an old Jesuit map on which Cheat River is depicted as Cheek River. They think it an Indian word. Perhaps. It is more of a sound than a word. A bird, mouse, or even an obscure Greenbrier River fish can say cheek perfectly. However there is a word from the Creek Indians pronounced like cheek that means red. There fore it is as good a guess as any to say that it is Red River, for it is noted for its red appearing water.

To revert to the road question. Cheat River, Greenbrier River, and Blue Stone River lie end to end across the State and so the Five Nations found and used them, and at a later day, The Road Commission found and are using them.

"In my school-days, when I had lost  
one shaft,  
I shot his fellow of the self same  
flight  
The self-same way with more ad-  
vised watch,  
To find the other forth, and by ad-  
venturing both  
I oft found both."

So with the old and new Seneca Trail. The same problem solved in the same way. The rivers and the mountains are unchangable.

I hope that it will please both the Maxwell historians to consider the question whether the Seneca Trail could have possibly crossed to the eastern waters, especially in view of the fact that they were careful to leave the Potomac waters alone.